Los Indios Matacos y su Lengua
[The Mataco Indians and their Language]

by
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Part I

Preliminary Introduction

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Before Mr. Juan Pelleschi published his interesting and painstaking book "Ocho Meses en el Gran Chaco" [Eight Months in the Gran Chaco] the language of the Matacos was practically unknown, although it was common knowledge that many tribes spoke it. It is hard to understand how this language could have disappeared so completely without leaving so much as a trace in the archives of the Jesuit Fathers; but the fact is that even at the beginning of the past century Father Machoni himself complained about the loss of grammars and vocabularies of the Tonocoté language, with which language I identify the Mataco-Mataguayo tongue [797] and which was the language used by the Jesuit missionaries to indoctrinate and evangelize these Indians.

In the early part of this century Hervás and Adelung, the former with his "Catálogo de las Lenguas" [Catalogue of Languages] the latter with his "Mithridates," were able to mention only the name of the language, as though to have on record that they were aware of its existence, but they lamented that they had been unable to secure a single fact in regard to it, not even a Pater Noster with which to illustrate their extremely sparse knowledge of this interesting group of languages spoken by countless Indians, (that is to say by Chaco Indians). The fact is that some time later the scholarly French traveler Alcides d'Orbigny, took

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Translator's Note: The Spanish word "cristiano" when used as a noun which literally means "Christian" has been translated throughout as "white man" or "white," since the translator feels that this is really closer to its basic meaning. "Non-Indian" might have been used instead but it seemed cumbersome and did not carry with it the tone of superiority which both "cristiano" in Spanish and "white" in English (however unfortunately) carry.

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M read in the same place that the most commonly used language in the
175 Chaco was the Tonocoté, that it was not Toba or the language of Cuzco, for it says there that "Father Juan Oloris knew the language of the Incas, and was learning Tonocoté, which was the language of the Chaco mission."

VIII

What Father Lozano Says

M● What precedes has been extracted from the work of Father Techo.
114 I shall now do likewise with the Descripción Chorográfica [Chorographic
●128 Description] of the Chaco written by Father Lozano and published in Córdoba in 1733.

This author retold most of what Father Techo had written in this regard, but also added many details of interest which illustrate the former text and serve to eliminate some doubts. In this chapter I shall set down all that Lozano has said about the Matacos or Mataguayos, and the references will be to the pages of the book written by this priest.

Speaking of the Paraná river, page 25, he says: "The region which this great river waters in the Chaco is inhabited by the infidel Abipones, some Mocovíes who fled from the Salta frontier, and the Callagaes, who at one time used to be called Matarães."

Father Lozano devotes pages 39 and 51 to recounting the tradition, which he relates in his history of Tucumán, [regarding Indian migration under Spanish pressure--Translator] to explain the cause for the Chaco's dense population. Undoubtedly the Chaco was the apparent refuge [573] for the more belligerent Indians and for those in revolt, and it is probable that what was happening then was a repetition of the numberless previous migrations of a like kind. Those who were dissatisfied and answered to the Inca also fled to the Chacos.

M On page 51 Lozano gives a list of the nations inhabiting the
175 Chaco from which I shall extract the following by reason of its being relevant to this study: "Mataguayos ... Amulalaes, in times past called Matarás ... Tonocotés ... Chunipies ... Callages ...

"On the river Pilcomayo, at a distance of 40 leagues from the Andean mountains live the Tobas and Mataguayos, the two nations numbering about 4,000 members and who are eaters of human flesh." (page 53). As ever the Tobas live as close neighbors to the Matacos.

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"Note:--The material contained in the foregoing chapters has been taken from the book Otto Mesi ["Eight Months" --Translator] in which it was set down in a hodgepodge manner and in the order in which the author had come upon it in his travels, which is only natural when one is going about with a note pad in one's hand faithfully setting down facts of interest. This order was not convenient in a work such as the present for many reasons, not the least being ease of reference. However little these Indian languages may lend themselves to rules of a sum, es, fui type, it is always best to try to explain them in grammatical terms familiar to us. Everything is conventional anyway in this realm for, except for cases such as the Volapuk, every language was first spoken and then written and only much later reduced to grammar.

The chapter dealing with pronouns was compiled from loose observations found in several chapters. The importance of this "part of speech," if we may use the term, when speaking of the Mataco language, necessitated a separate chapter, however short and unsatisfactory, in view of the fact that it is the most difficult element for every collector of vocabularies. This difficulty was the cause of the author's not having such a chapter in his original essay, a lack which we have here remedied--The Editor."

[Pages 275-350 of the Spanish text consist of a Mataco vocabulary which has not been translated into English and will be found only in category 116 with the rest of the foreign text. --Analyst]